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SUBJECT: JAPANESE MORNING PRESS HIGHLIGHTS 02/20/07-2

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16) Armitage Report -- Revised Edition -- stresses Japan-US cooperation on strategy toward China, calls for expansion of Japan's role in defense area

MAINICHI (Page 6) (Full)  
Eve., February 17, 2007

By Masaya Oikawa in Washington

A bipartisan group of experts led by former Deputy Secretary of State Armitage issued on Feb. 16 a revised edition of the "Armitage Report," which lays out a strategy toward Japan, looking ahead at the Asia situation in 2020. The report stresses the need for the United States and Japan to respond strategically to a rising China. In addition, while the report welcomes the activities of the Self-Defense Forces for the international community, with services in the Indian Ocean and in Iraq following the terrorist attacks on the US, it also urges Japan to expand its role in the defense area. The previous report, issued in 2000, later became the basic policy line for strengthening the bilateral security alliance. The revised report, too, is likely to have a powerful influence on the Japanese and US governments.

On China, the report states, "An important challenge for China is securing energy resources." As a result, the report warns of friction arising over such issues as competition to acquire resources in the ocean. Stating, "It will be the US and Japan that will affect China's moves the most," the report states that "Japan and the US should cooperate closely" on a strategy toward China.

On the other hand, the report predicts that in 2020, India will

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"have a presence that surpasses China's." The panel urges the US and Japan to strengthen a strategic partnership with India -- a democracy with shared values -- and to establish a trilateral relationship among US, Japan, and India aimed at China.

Moreover, on the Korean Peninsula issue, the report states that "the possibility is great that there will be unification by 2020," but it also points out, "There is the possibility of North Korea to continue to produce nuclear weapons." The report proposes, "Japan and the US should prepare for all sorts of scenarios."

Regarding strengthening the US-Japan alliance, the report states: "The US will continue to be a key element in Japan's national security," and it points out the need to stress repeatedly the role of the US as Japan's nuclear umbrella. On the other hand, the panel urges Japan to take broader responsibility for the defense of its homeland. It lauds the debates in Japan on constitutional reform and on establishing a permanent law for overseas dispatches of the SDF. In addition, the report urges Japan to 1) increase defense spending; 2) scrap the three principles on weapons exports; and 3) jointly develop with the US the next generation US warship that would be equipped with missile-defense capability.

The drafters of the Armitage Report are as before Armitage (Republican); Harvard University Professor Joseph Nye (Democrat); former National Security Council senior director of Asian affairs Michael Green, former Defense Department senior official Campbell and other Japan experts.

17) US House of Representatives' resolution on comfort women issue becoming a test for Abe's "soft diplomacy"; Revision of Kono statement (on comfort women issue) could also heat up again

MAINICHI (Page 5) (Excerpts)  
February 20, 2007

The issue of the US House of Representatives having passed a resolution demanding an apology from the Japanese government for World War II military-controlled comfort women (i.e., sex slaves) was debated on Feb. 10 in the Lower House Budget Committee, as well. The focus was on how to treat the 1993 "Statement by Chief Cabinet

Secretary Yohei Kono," in which an apology was made for the

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involvement of the former Japan Imperial Army. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has taken the position, "We will accept and follow the Kono Statement," but a group of conservative members of the government and ruling party who seek to revise the Kono Statement reacted sharply. Set off by the resolution, the issue is expected for break out into the public, an ironic development. This is likely to be a strong test of Prime Minister Abe's "soft diplomacy," under which Abe has kept silent on the issue of prime ministerial visits to Yasukuni Shrine in order to improve ties with China and the Republic of Korea.

Foreign Minister Aso's comment: "The resolution (presented by the US House of Representatives) is not based on objective fact. It is extremely regrettable since it did not take into consideration the response by the Japanese government." (Feb. 10, in the Lower House Budget Committee)

18) Japan, China to establish defense hotline to exchange views on North Korea issue and other matters

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NIHON KEIZAI (Page 2) (Excerpts)  
February 19, 2007

Tokyo and Beijing have begun considering the establishment of a hotline between Japan's Defense Ministry and China's People's Liberation Army. The purpose is to enable the two countries' top defense leaders to keep in touch at all times to exchange views on the East Asia situation, including the North Korean issue. Exchanges of defense authorities of the two countries have resumed following Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit to China last year, which has helped improve bilateral relations. The two countries intend to identify the new move as a symbol of their diplomatic thaw.

A defense hotline is already in place with South Korea as well as with the United States, Japan's ally. The Defense Ministry has installed an exclusive telephone line for a telephone number exchanged in advance with South Korea that is not open to other agencies at home and abroad. Defense leaders can leave messages on the machine, as necessary.

A study is underway to establish a similar arrangement with China. Tokyo and Beijing intend to come up with a concrete plan by summer to be ready for a visit to Japan in September by Chinese National Defense Minister Cao Gangchuan, as part of defense exchanges between the two countries.

19) Japan, Russia to expand disaster cooperation around northern islands

MAINICHI (Page 1) (Slightly abridged)  
February 17, 2007

The governments of Japan and Russia has started final coordination with an eye to strengthening cooperation on the area of disaster relief in the case of earthquakes and tsunamis near the disputed four northern islands off Hokkaido. The expectation is that a formal agreement on the issue will be reached in a meeting between Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Russian Premier Mikhail Fradkov, who will arrive in Japan on Feb. 27. The Japanese government hopes to see progress on bilateral talks on the Northern Territories issue, which have been stagnant, through urgently needed cooperation on disaster cooperation measures.

There were two earthquakes of the magnitude of 8.0 or so last November and January this year. The quakes caused damage to the east coast of Hokkaido and Sakhalin. The Meteorological Agency has said that the two countries have a common risk. However the observation is that it is not easy for the two countries to cooperate with each other in coming up with comprehensive measures in this area since the issue of ownership of the Northern Territories has yet to be resolved. An official involved in disaster relief affairs said: "The

two countries should hurry to create a disaster coordination system."

Foreign Minister Taro Aso clearly stated in a national convention to call on the return of Northern Territories on Feb. 7:

"We will push forward with cooperation (with Russia) on the disaster coordination area as part of improving the environment for promotion on the bilateral negotiations on the territorial issue."

The Russian side also stressed the significance of bilateral

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cooperation on disaster countermeasures, noting, "Cooperation (between Japan and Russia) may become possible over the South Kurile (four northern islands), which have been the object of dispute between the two countries."

Tokyo and Moscow agreed to make an action plan for disaster cooperation measures in an experts meeting in early Feb. Moscow intends to incorporate in the action plan such efforts as building monitoring stations on isolated islands.

20) Aso talks with Mottaki on phone

YOMIURI (Page 4) (Full)  
February 20, 2007

Foreign Minister Taro Aso talked on the phone with Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki for about 40 minutes yesterday. Aso told Mottaki that in accordance with a UN Security Council resolution on Iran's nuclear programs, Japan has invoked sanctions, such as a freeze on assets, against 10 groups and 12 individuals who are allegedly involved in the development of nuclear and missile programs. Aso again urged Iraq to completely halt uranium enrichment activities, saying, "I would like to see a settlement of the issue in accordance with the UN Security Council resolution. It is regrettable that a positive response has not been shown." In response, Mottaki rejected Japan's call for ending uranium enrichment activities, while criticizing the United States and other countries.

21) Japanese, Australian foreign and defense chiefs to hold regular meetings: Three countries including US to set up bureau-director-level meetings as well

YOMIURI (Page 2) (Full)  
February 20, 2007

The government yesterday decided to establish regular talks with Australia of foreign and defense ministers. Japan and the US, and the US and Australia already have frameworks like the Japan-US Security Affairs Consultative Committee, a so-called two-plus-two meeting of defense and foreign ministers. The aim of setting up a similar framework with Australia is, therefore, to reinforce ties among the three countries.

US Vice President Cheney will visit Japan and Australia starting today. He is expected to discuss security cooperation among the three countries with Prime Minister Abe and others. Australian Prime Minister Howard will also visit Japan in mid-March. The three countries have decided to establish a framework to make the proposed cooperation into a concrete deal availing themselves of those visits. The government wants to realize the first session of the Japan-Australia two-plus-two meeting and a Japan-US-Australia bureau-director-level meeting around Howard's Japan visit.

Discussions at the talks will focus on measures to deal with possible terrorist attacks in the Pacific and natural disasters. The three countries already enjoy cooperative operations in such areas as can be seen in the fact that they promptly carried out relief activities in cooperation after 2004 Sumatra earthquake and Indian Ocean tsunami. They will look into more detailed measures.

The three countries also plan to use the frameworks as a venue for

obtaining cooperation on the North Korea issue from Australia, which is not a member of the six-party talks.

The three countries have a strategic dialogue of foreign ministers but not of defense ministers. Since it is difficult for foreign and defense ministers of the three countries to meet all together in terms of schedules, the three countries have decided to establish three two-plus-two frameworks undergirded by bureau-director-level meetings.

22) LDP executive members, including Nakagawa, complain about cabinet ministers' "lack of respect" for the prime minister

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Excerpts)  
February 20, 2007

Liberal Democratic Party executive members, including Secretary General Hidenao Nakagawa and Policy Research Council Chairman Shoichi Nakagawa, have unprecedentedly complained about the lack of intensity and unity in the Abe cabinet.

In a liaison meeting of the government and the ruling parties yesterday, Secretary General Nakagawa, who had called on cabinet ministers to have a sense of loyalty toward the prime minister, complained before the prime minister and key cabinet members:

"Party members have begun to make remarks expressing concern about the lack of unity in the government. Cabinet ministers and bureaucrats are not allowed to give priority to their own views."

"The lack of unity" pointed out by Nakagawa is also seen from recent words and actions by close aides to the prime minister over the issue of rebuilding education.

The prime minister has indicated a willingness to have bills related to educational revitalization enacted in the current Diet session. However, Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirofumi Shimomura said on a TV program, "Having the bills passed in the current session should be considered flexibly." Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuhisa Shiozaki also implied a view similar to Shimomura's.

Cabinet ministers have made controversial remarks in succession, including Yanagisawa's comment and Defense Minister Fumio Kyuma's remarks critical of the United States. The LDP executive has judged that the lack of intensity in the government has allowed the cabinet ministers to make such remarks. Secretary General Nakagawa also seems to have the impression that such cabinet ministers are making light of the young prime minister.

Asked for his view about Nakagawa's statement last night, the prime minister dismissed the concern in the LDP executive, saying: "Ask Secretary General Nakagawa. You have no need to worry."

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In the LDP, though, a sense of alarm toward the cabinet's plummeting support rate is growing in the run-up to the House of Councillors election. Complaints and requests toward the cabinet are likely to continue.

23) Cabinet support rate continues to drop; Calls for cabinet shuffle smoldering but Prime Minister Abe rejects possibility

YOMIURI (Page 4) (Excerpts)

TOKYO 00000702 006 OF 008

February 20, 2007

The ruling coalition is increasingly alarmed over the House of Councillors election campaign in the summer, since the support rate for the Abe cabinet has continued to fall. A senior Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) member close to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has called on the cabinet ministers to act properly since he sees that

the low cabinet support stems from inappropriate words and deeds by cabinet ministers, including Health Minister Yanagisawa calling women "baby-making machines" and the large amount of office expenses by politicians. There is also smoldering debate about a cabinet reshuffle even though Abe has repeatedly said that he has no intention of conducting one.

During a meeting yesterday of the government and the ruling parties, LDP Secretary General Hidenao Nakagawa stated: "The government, the ruling coalition, and cabinet ministers should unite under the prime minister's initiative." In his speech on Feb. 18, too, Nakagawa sought absolute loyalty and sacrifice from cabinet ministers for the prime minister. In yesterday's meeting, New Komeito Secretary General Kazuo Kitagawa sided with Nakagawa.

Former Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori also expressed unhappiness with some cabinet members, telling reporters on Feb. 13 in India:

"Financial Services Minister Yamamoto, Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Amari and Internal Affairs and Communications Minister Suga do not follow the prime minister. Defense Minister Kyuma, Foreign Minister Aso and Finance Minister Omi, who are senior to Prime Minister Abe and serving in the Diet more terms than the prime minister, do not seem to respect the prime minister."

Both Mori and Nakagawa, who have close ties with Abe, believe that cabinet ministers' blunders and their words and actions making light of the prime minister are reasons for the declining support rate for the Abe cabinet. So they have repeated criticism of cabinet members. They also appear to be protecting Abe by doing so.

Although Abe has calmly said, "I'm not doing my job in the hope of raising support rates," it appears that he has recently taken pains to regain support. To that end, he visited Akita Prefecture on Feb. 13. He is expected to go to Niigata Prefecture on Feb. 25. Since the largest opposition party Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan) plans to make social disparities as a campaign issue for the July Upper House election, Abe aims to obtain public support by showing his stance of placing priority on improving local economies.

In consideration of criticism that he is in over his head, Abe has made efforts to communicate with the ruling bloc. He has held already met four times at night with ruling coalition lawmakers although he held such a meeting only once a month last October and November soon after he took office.

24) Opposition parties expect victory in Upper House election

YOMIURI (Page 4) (Full)  
February 20, 2007

Opposition parties intend to bring about a reversal of the places of the ruling and opposition camps in the summer's House of Councillors election by escalating their stance of opposing the Abe cabinet, whose support rate continues to drop.

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Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan) Diet Affairs Committee Chairman Yoshiaki Takagi commented yesterday on the slumping support rate for the Abe cabinet:

"The government and ruling parties have failed to reach an agreement on education reform. I assume that such instability is causing the declining support rate. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has not fulfilled his leadership role."

Minshuto Chief Deputy Secretary General Watanabe said: "The prime minister's reform drive has not sense of the people's living conditions. Minshuto will come up with specific measures to tackle the pension system and the lack of medical doctors so that we can win the Upper House election."

25) Secretaries general of three opposition parties to meet today to discuss a submission of non-confidence motion against Yanagisawa

A move is afoot again in the opposition camp, to explore the possibility of submitting a non-confidence motion against Health, Labor and Welfare Minister Hakuo Yanagisawa for his controversial remark calling women "baby-making machines." The secretaries general of Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan), the Social Democratic Party, and the People's New Party are scheduled to meet today to discuss the matter, but some members looked puzzled, with one member saying, "We have already missed the chance."

Minshuto Secretary General Yukio Hatoyama said in a press conference in Kofu City on Feb. 17, "I would like to meet (the secretaries general of) Minshuto and the People's New Party early next week and reach an agreement" on the idea of submitting a non-confidence motion.

The idea emerged around when the three opposition parties and the Japanese Communist Party boycotted Diet deliberations in reaction to the controversial remark by Yanagisawa early this month. By submitting a resolution, the opposition bloc aimed to have ruling party members take a loyalty test and use it as an opportunity for them to return to Diet deliberations, but it decided to give it up in the end, based on the judgment that if the motion was rejected, the result would be that confidence would be placed in Yanagisawa instead.

26) Tokyo Governor Ishihara declines recommendation from LDP

YOMIURI (Page 2) (Slightly Abridged)  
February 20, 2007

Governor Shintaro Ishihara (74), who has declared his candidacy for the Tokyo gubernatorial election to be announced on March 22 (voting day on Apr. 8) to seek a third term, yesterday conveyed to Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Secretary General Nakagawa his decision to decline a recommendation from the LDP. He will contest the election as an independent with no backing from any political party, as was the case in the past two gubernatorial elections.

The LDP had decided to back him in mid-January and had been ready to issue a recommendation by Prime Minister Abe. According to Nakagawa,

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Ishihara told him on the phone: "Making this decision from a broad perspective, I will run without backing from any political party. Please understand my decision."

Ishihara once indicated that he would accept the recommendation from the LDP responding to a strong call to do so from the party's Tokyo chapter. However, he presumably has judged that in view of the election of Hideo Higashikokubaru as a non-affiliated candidate in the Miyazaki gubernatorial election on Jan. 21, it would not be wise to have a strong political party stamp.

SCHIEFFER